Andrea A. Lunsford

Writing Matters

RHETORIC IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIVES

VISIT…

WRITING MATTERS

ANDREA A. LUNSFORD

Writing

Georgia Southern University Jack N. and
Addie D. Averitt Lecture Series ~ Number 15

Matters

RHETORIC IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIVES

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FOREWORD

Andrea A. Lunsford, speaker at the fifteenth annual Jack N. and Addie D. Averitt Lecture Series, embodies the best qualities of a college professor, a profession that calls for its members to be exemplary scholars, dedicated teachers, and (perhaps not often enough) engaged members of their wider communities. Professor Lunsford adds to these expectations an outstanding publication record, a commitment to her students that extends far beyond the classroom, a genuine concern about language and literacy inside and outside the academy, and perhaps most importantly, a fully developed sense of humor (both about herself and her world). Her fourteen books and wide variety of chapters and articles on the history of rhetoric, collaborative writing, intellectual property, and technologies of writing, her work at Ohio State and currently at Stanford University as director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric, and her speaking engagements and workshop presentations throughout North America attest to her wide influence on graduate and undergraduate students, university and secondary school teachers, and the community at large.

Professor Lunsford's Averitt Lectures, which have been collected in this volume, demonstrate her enthusiasm for and concern about language and literacy issues. In the first chapter of this book, Lunsford discusses a new course she and colleagues at Stanford designed

for sophomores that emphasizes both oral and multimedia delivery in the writing process, and she frankly describes how difficult it has been to implement such training. Her second chapter moves outside the classroom to emphasize the importance of having a linguistically pluralistic society; to do this she takes a critical look at the English First movement and discusses Ebonics, the canon wars, hypertextual and graphic novels, nontraditional academic prose, and the uses of new technology in writing. Chapter 3 focuses on refiguring classroom authority and urges teachers to stress collaboration and a model of shared responsibility. The final chapter expresses her concerns about the paucity of women and minorities in tenured university faculty ranks and urges colleges to reexamine admission and retention practices and consider including collaboration, increased oral presentation, teacher training, and community outreach in their programs. Throughout the book, Lunsford stresses the strong connections between writing and the changing sociopolitical and technological world.

Both the lecture series and this book have been made possible through a generous ongoing gift from Dr. Jack N. Averitt and his late wife, Addie. The series was established in 1990 to provide the university and southern Georgia with access to internationally recognized scholars in English and history. The three-lecture series is designed for a wide audience of faculty, students, and community members and demonstrates Dr. Averitt's commitment to enhancing the intellectual climate of our region. Dr. Averitt has been an enthusiastic supporter of the series in many ways other than financial ones. He attends every lecture and social event associated with the series, and he demonstrates an avid and intellectual interest in the speakers, who have represented a wide range of academic discourses

over the years, including history, literature, literary theory, rhetoric, and philosophy. Dr. Lunsford's lectures would not have taken place (and this book would not exist) without Dr. Averitt's initiative, generosity, and continuing support.

This particular series certainly would not have gone as smoothly as it did were it not for my colleague from the Department of Writing and Linguistics, Dr. Patricia Price. She initially suggested Professor Lunsford (with my enthusiastic support), negotiated the myriad details involved in setting up her visit, including catering, lodging, and decorating, and made sure the proper people were paid at the proper time. Patricia did all this competently and gracefully. (Given what we both learned about logistics, invitations, dinners, receptions, and preparation for the lectures themselves, we feel that we will now be able to handle the future weddings of our daughters with ease!) Thanks should also go out to our respective department chairs, Mr. Eric Nelson of Writing and Linguistics and Dr. David Dudley of Literature and Philosophy, and to our dean, Dr. Jane Rhoades Hudak, for their support, advice, and participation. I would personally like to say how much I appreciate my American literature students, who displayed such professionalism in handing out the programs. As always, Helen Cannon at Georgia's Bed and Breakfast made us all feel comfortable, well fed, and more gracious than we are in real life. Once again, all of us here at Georgia Southern University would like to thank Dr. Averitt for making it possible for us to get to know Professor Lunsford and her important work in such a pleasant and personal setting.

Caren Town

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

I began my career as a scholar and teacher of the history of writing and literacy thinking that I understood what writing was—where it came from, what roles it plays in our lives, what changes it has undergone over the millennia. But the reading and research I have done over the course of my career reveal just how naïve my early assessment was. Writing, so ubiquitous that to many it is as invisible as the air we breathe, began to slither out of my grasp, growing increasingly complex, difficult to define, sometimes deeply mysterious. One of the Western world's oldest technologies, writing—like the art of rhetoric to which it is often linked—is plastic, endlessly adaptable to new situations, challenges, and opportunities, and thus difficult to pin down, to know with certainty.

This adaptability marks the power of writing, a power that is understood by many in almost visceral ways. For some twenty-five years, I've been asking students, colleagues, and any other audiences I came across to capture their very earliest memories of writing, and over the years I have found that these memories fall predictably into two categories. For most people, the earliest memories of writing have to do with naming the self, with writing one's name. In one magical moment, a child writes, scratches, paints, or otherwise makes marks in the shape of letters that form her name, and there it is, a representation of the child that is somehow separate from

but deeply connected to her. That child has now made her mark on the world, literally changing the world in so doing. So the most prevalent early memory of writing links it to personal efficacy and power. But the second most prevalent memory of writing—the one reported to me almost as often as the first—links writing with pain, punishment, or humiliation: being made to write "I will not do X" a thousand times turns up in many stories, as do other examples of writing used as a form of punishment.

As one who loves words and loves writing them, coming to terms with this second memory of writing was difficult. Yet this negative power of writing is very real: in addition to serving as a form of punishment, think of all the ways in which writing can circumscribe and limit our lives. Elspeth Stuckey details some of the ways in which school writing scars young learners in *The Violence of Literacy*; in a doctoral dissertation on "Forms of Submission," Ebony Coletu traces the effect of welfare applications and other forms of writing on the lives of those in crisis who need to use them. And students instinctively know that they are affected in often dramatic ways by writing—on the SAT, ACT, GRE, LSAT, MCAT and countless other examinations that can determine the choices they will have later in life.

Teachers and students of writing need to be aware of these two memories of writing and to be aware, as well, that all writers struggle to write rather than to be written by other people or institutions. Far from a mere tool for transcribing thoughts, writing always has the potential to be epistemic, to create new knowledge—which can then be used for good or ill.

For me, then, the stakes of writing and of teaching—of professing—writing are always high. Momentarily, when I got my first

computer in 1984, I thought these stakes might be lowered: surely this newest technology of writing might take over for me, producing writing for me, perhaps even *teaching* writing for me. Perhaps under these new circumstances, writing would become less important, more like the simple set of skills by which it is often defined. Now we know, of course, that the digital revolution has made writing more pervasive and potentially more powerful than ever, and it has opened the doors to writing for many (anyone today can be an "author," for example) even as it has worked to limit access to many others. In the age of the Net and Web, people are writing more than ever before, and what they are writing can be read (and responded to) by millions within only a few seconds. In short, changes in technology have changed the nature, status, and scope of writing in such profound ways that they call for a new definition of writing.

Look in any dictionary and you will find only the most instrumental definitions for the term: "writing . . . the action of one who writes," "that which is written," and so on. But today, writing is literally electric; it contains images, sounds, and colors. It has been transformed in ways that many people of my generation find deeply problematic, since it so clearly moves beyond the print literacy with which writing has been associated since the Greek era. Where writing once meant *print* text—black marks on white paper, left to right and top to bottom—today "writing" is in full Technicolor; it is nonlinear and alive with sounds, voices, and images of all kinds. And where most adults grew up with books, as Shirley Brice Heath points out, today's students, digital "natives," "were literally born into high-tech cribs; they speak, view, and listen to digital language with the ease of first language learners" (ix). For these students, "writing" goes far beyond the traditional book and, in fact, comprises such digital

language, from blogs, wikis, and instant messages to cell phones with full visual capabilities, Web texts such as zines, and online comics. These forms of writing are most often performative and highly visual, and they tend increasingly not to rely on, or even to need, traditional print text.

It is by now a commonplace to say that these changes in the nature of writing mark the greatest change in literacy since what Eric Havelock and Walter Ong refer to as the "literate revolution" in ancient Greece. These changes raise significant challenges to those who study and teach writing: how can we best evaluate these new forms of writing? What do we know about their multilayered structures, syntaxes, and styles? What does it mean to use such forms in *ethical* ways? Who will have access to these forms—and who will be disenfranchised? And perhaps most problematic, how should we prepare those who will be teaching the next generation of students? In the short run, scholars and teachers must seek answers to these questions by studying writing in all its forms and functions, which will allow them to develop a vocabulary and grammar adequate to describe it. As we go about this work, however, we must remember that what has not changed is the power of writing to make space for human agency—or to radically limit such agency. For this reason alone, writing matters—and it matters a great deal.

WRITING MATTERS

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One

KEY QUESTIONS FOR A NEW RHETORIC

Most U.S. scholars of rhetoric and writing studies who are around my age have a story to tell about how and when they discovered rhetoric, and I am certainly no exception. I started teaching at a two-year college in Florida in 1968, after having completed my MA in English and taught in high school for a couple of years. A year or two later, the dean of the college asked me to write some student writing guides for the required composition courses. I spent the entire summer working on this project and ended up with little booklets on Writing an Expository Essay, Writing a Descriptive Essay, Writing a Narrative Essay, Writing a Persuasive Essay, and—what I was especially proud of—Writing a "Combination" Essay. I had figured out how to write these booklets by finding essays in these modes and analyzing them, breaking them down into steps, and then trying to guide students through that process. I did this completely by instinct: I was utterly without training in the teaching of writing, having been exempted from the required courses at my university, having only gone through a one-half-day training session before I became a teaching assistant during my MA program, and having

taught only literature in high school. So I was fairly proud of coming up with something to say about how to write various kinds of college papers.

Pride, as they say, goeth before a fall. And one day that autumn, after the school year started and I had presented the booklets to my dean, I received a complimentary book from Oxford University Press. It was titled *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, by Edward P. J. Corbett. I knew absolutely nothing about rhetoric, classical or otherwise, so I took the book home with me and started to read—and to discover rhetoric. What I found, of course, was that I had no need to invent everything in those booklets from scratch: here before me was a systematic account of the arts of communication, one that had been around for over two thousand years. I tell this story to remind myself, and others, that the "old" rhetoric was entirely new to me and, indeed, that the "old," or traditional, rhetoric has a way of becoming new to successive generations of students and scholars.

The next year I got up the courage to apply to PhD programs, and on the top of my list was Ohio State University, where Professor Corbett taught. I studied there for five years and became the first person at that university to take a specialty in rhetoric and writing studies, though I pretty much had to do this all in directed reading sessions with Professor Corbett, who was not teaching graduate courses on rhetoric when I got there. The tradition I studied with Ed Corbett was decidedly "old": I worked my way chronologically from Plato and Aristotle to Chaim Perelman and Kenneth Burke. By the time I left Ohio State for the University of British Columbia in 1977, other graduate students were choosing to pursue specialties in rhetoric and writing. In 1987 I returned to Ohio State to help build

the undergraduate and graduate program in rhetoric and writing within the Department of English. Today that university has fourteen scholars specializing in rhetoric and writing, a writing minor at the undergraduate level, a full graduate program, and a Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing—all in addition to the required first-year writing program.

Ohio State's program is typical of that of a number of large state universities in the United States, where the revival of rhetoric in the 1960s (this was the "new" rhetoric of the time) took hold most strongly. What characterized those early programs was a deep commitment to undergraduate education and to access to that education for all students; a recognition that the ancient art of rhetoric, which Aristotle defined both as "the art of discovering in any case all the available means of persuasion" and as "the art and practice of coming to sound judgment," provided a robust theoretical and historical foundation for the teaching of writing; and a determination to achieve disciplinary status for the field of rhetoric and writing studies, then widely referred to as "composition and rhetoric." What was new in this rendition of the rhetorical tradition was the very self-conscious linking of rhetoric with writing or composition.

In retrospect, it's clear that as the cultural capital of writing grew, beginning with the invention of the printing press and reaching a crescendo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fortunes of rhetoric declined. What counted was not the eloquence of old but what could be put in writing. As a result, colleges increasingly turned away from the "old" rhetorical tradition, which had stressed the importance of students composing and performing their own discourses, to controlled instruction in correct writing and, primar-

ily, to reading, to hermeneutics, and to the consumption rather than the production of discourse. So what was "new" in the 1960s and 1970s revival of rhetoric was, at least in part, an attempt to return to the old tradition and to concentrate on the actual discursive practices and products of student writers.[1] Not coincidentally, this "new" rhetoric with its commitment to student writing was to form the basis for a new discipline, which Robert Connors calls Composition-Rhetoric.

In some ways, these goals have been met in the United States, sometimes even spectacularly so. Today, several book series, such as those at the University of Pittsburgh Press and Southern Illinois University Press, and dozens of journals are devoted to rhetoric and writing, and at least one of them, *College Composition and Communication*, is harder to publish in than the Modern Language Association's *PMLA*. Scores of intensive PhD programs in rhetoric and writing crisscross the country, and the ever-growing number of conferences—among them those sponsored by the Rhetoric Society of America and the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition—now make it impossible for any scholar to attend them all. Even the so-called Ivy League schools like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale have begun writing programs for undergraduates. At Stanford the Program in Writing and Rhetoric teaches two required courses for all students and offers several undergraduate elective courses in writing and rhetoric as well as at least two graduate courses every year (I am currently teaching a graduate seminar on rhetoric's fourth canon, *memoria*, or memory).

Such successes are at best only partial, however: writing and rhetoric is still a marginalized field that faces daunting challenges, and many U.S. scholars would agree, I think, that the future of the

discipline depends on responding to these challenges in ways that will help to create and maintain yet another "new" rhetoric.

First among these challenges is location: where within the university should a "new" rhetoric be housed and what should be its institutional affiliations and responsibilities? In the United States, these questions are up for grabs. Most programs in rhetoric and writing remain within departments of English (or occasionally departments of communications), but the last decade has seen a trend toward putting rhetoric and writing programs into departments of their own that offer both undergraduate and graduate courses. These new departments do not yet have a firm core: some focus on professional discourse, some on literacy and language, some on media, some on history, some on technology and writing, and some try for an omnibus approach that would bring all these strands together. What is lost in such a move, of course, is the connection to reading and literature, which remain in departments of English. What is gained, however, is a chance to establish disciplinary power within university structures and to create programs and courses responsive to student needs in the twenty-first century. My own sense is that such new departments will continue to proliferate, and that in doing so the outlines of an undergraduate major in rhetoric and writing will grow ever more clear. But I have some doubts, not about departments of rhetoric and writing per se, but about departments in general: it seems clear that disciplinary boundaries are crumbling, that the old framework of departments, based on the nineteenth-century German system, is no longer adequate for the work scholars need to do, and that some other structure needs to arise (a sign of this is the exponential growth of interdisciplinary centers and institutes). So a "new" department of rhetoric and writing may find itself "old" fairly shortly.

No matter where rhetoric and writing is located, the field faces

other serious challenges and opportunities, chief among them the relationship to new technologies. When I think of the changes I have seen in my lifetime, my head fairly swims. When I won the ninth-grade typing medal in my junior high school, I did it on a manual typewriter, the kind you had to literally pound. As an undergraduate, I had the luxury of a portable manual typewriter; not until graduate school did I sink into the pleasures of the IBM Selectric. At the age of sixty-four, then, I am old enough to take a long view of the history of writing and rhetoric's connection to technology. Still, I was little prepared for the learning curve I faced when I got my first computer in 1985.

Since then I have become more proficient—and I am still a rocket-fast keyboarder thanks to that ninth-grade drilling. But I am still very much a learner of the new media, one who is almost daily surprised by how writing and the teaching of writing have changed in the thirty years of my career. Every few years, a new body of literature needs to be learned, a new set of practices and a new kind of teaching mastered. I realize as I look back over my career that I and other teachers of writing and rhetoric have had to reinvent ourselves and our discipline several times and that more change is in sight. Thus the newest "new" rhetoric is one that is deeply mediated, deeply technologized. In fact, writing is one of the Western world's oldest technologies and rhetoric, plastic art that it is, has consistently transformed itself in relation to new and emerging technologies. Today, this ability to mold itself to new realities is key to the new rhetoric, presenting special challenges and special opportunities for those who teach rhetoric and writing.

No change has been more significant than the return of orality, performance, and delivery to the field of rhetoric and writing and to the

classroom. As noted above, in the United States, the increasing hegemony of writing throughout the nineteenth century began to hide the body and performance from critical view and shifted attention away from oral and embodied delivery to textual production of the printed page. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, however, and growing exponentially in the last two decades, the arts and crafts associated with delivery, the fifth canon of rhetoric, have moved to the center of our discipline. To view writing as an active performance—that is, as an act always involving the body and performance—enriches I. A. Richards's notion of the interanimation of words: it is not only that individual words shift meaning given their context within a sentence, but also that words shift meaning given their embodied context and their physical location in the world. Calling attention to this phenomenon raises our awareness of the power language gains through human beings' physical interaction and exchange, and it transforms our understanding of Kenneth Burke's definition of human beings as "symbol-using, symbol-misusing animals." To be human is to speak and write *and perform* through multiple systems of signification and to inhabit not only what Walter Ong calls "secondary orality"—a term associated with the electric technologies that make possible the phenomenon of 24/7 surround-sound split-screen cable-TV culture—but also "secondary literacy"—a term I use to name a literacy that is both highly inflected by oral forms, structures, and rhythms and highly aware of itself as writing, understood as variously organized and mediated systems of signification.

In this scene of secondary orality and secondary literacy, student writers must be able to think critically and carefully about how to deliver the knowledge they produce. Yet in the United States, we are still only marginally prepared to help them do so. It is as though our old reliable rhetorical triangle of writer, reader, and message

is transforming itself before our eyes, moving from three discrete angles to a shimmering, humming, dynamic set of performative relationships. And in this scene, writing favors immediacy, quickness, associative leaps, and a fluid and flexible sense of correctness—akin to what Winston Weathers long ago described as Grammar B. As I'm using it, then, secondary literacy advances a looser prose style, infiltrated by visual and aural components that mirror the agility and shiftiness of language filtered through and transformed by digital technologies and that allow for, indeed demand, performance. To describe such literacies, we need more expansive definitions of writing along with a flexible critical vocabulary and a catalog of the writing and rhetorical situations that call for amplified, performative, and embodied discourse of many different kinds.

The Read/Write Web log notes, in late April 2005, that "neither 'read' nor 'write' really means what it used to when we talk about literacy or being literate." My colleague Marvin Diogenes and I have talked endlessly about what I'm calling our "vocabulary problem," and eventually we tried our hand at defining writing in a way that does not mirror the reductiveness of current dictionary definitions:

> *Writing*: A technology for creating conceptual frameworks and creating, sustaining, and *performing* lines of thought within those frameworks, drawing from and expanding on existing conventions and genres, utilizing signs and symbols, incorporating materials drawn from multiple sources, and taking advantage of the resources of a full range of media.

For all its clumsiness, this definition captures the sense of writing I am trying to evoke—of a new rhetoric and writing as epistemic, performative, multivocal, multimodal, and multimediated.

One scholar who has been hard at work trying to create a more flexible critical vocabulary for writing and rhetoric is Tara Shankar, who completed her PhD in Media Arts and Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2005. In her dissertation, "Speaking on the Record," Shankar traces the increasing power of writing, which she terms graphocentrism, noting that writing eventually became "the primary outlet for the most elitist uses of languages in many cultures" (14). She argues that the domination of print-based writing is now at an end and introduces a set of terms aimed at clarifying communicative relationships. To begin, she defines literacy as "the knowledge of language, domains of experience, and structure of discourse that permit one to use language as an object for learning reflection and analysis" and distinguishes this from Seymour Papert's term *letteracy*, the "mechanical and presentational skills specific to writing" (21). This she contrasts with *prosodacy*, oral decoding and encoding abilities that "indicate awareness of ways in which situated intentions, emotion, identity, and expression can be realized in and through the repleteness of spoken language" (22). Into this mix she adds the key term *spriting*. By "sprite," a portmanteau combining speaking and writing, Shankar means speaking that "yields two technologically supported representations: the speech in audible form, and the speech in visual form. Spriting, therefore, equally encompasses digital speech recorders, speech editing tools, and any speech dictation recognition tools that would use speech in addition to text as an output mode" (15). The product of *spriting* she identifies as a spoken document, or *talkument*. As one *reads* a written text, she says, so one *audes* a talkument.

Much later in this fascinating dissertation, Shankar introduces spriting to two elementary schools and studies the collaborative

"talkuments" the children produce using "SpriterWriter," a system for composing and editing talkuments. Finding that students produce talkuments collaboratively with the greatest of ease, Shankar concludes that "spriting seems to admit even closer, more integral collaborations than does writing, perhaps because spriting can more easily incorporate conversation as both planning and composition material" (236). Even more provocative to me, Shankar finds that "when children [using this software] are released from the representational strictures of paper and pencil to compose language, they do not just talk their words, they sing their words. . . . They sing pure sound and rhythm, words, advertisements, school songs, popular songs and television theme songs with equal abandon." That is to say, they *perform*.

Shankar is not alone in her attention to performance. Jon Udell has also called for performative literacies to become the basis of writing programs in the United States. In a discussion of the power of screencasting, Udell says "writing and editing will remain the foundation skills they always were, but we'll increasingly combine them with speech and video." Shankar would agree. Teachers, however, can scarcely wait for our own community, much less our society, to refine and accept such new terminologies or to perfect the tools and techniques necessary to them.

While this work goes on, whatever we call what our students are doing is racing ahead of our ability to describe it. So what's a poor writing program to do? In the face of the enormous changes to literacies, Stanford's Program in Writing and Rhetoric has been challenged to add a second required course to the Stanford curriculum. This new course, which we implemented fully during the 2005–6 school year, has a complex mandate. In it, students are to build on the rhetorical analysis, research, and argument skills that

they learned in their first writing course (and delivered primarily in traditional print forms) by continuing to carry out substantive research and develop compelling argumentative positions. But the course shifts focus from invention, arrangement, and style to rhetoric's fifth canon, delivery.

Last September, the entire PWR faculty met for a week to work on this new PWR 2 course, and we ended the week exhilarated and enthusiastic about our goals:

- To build on the analytic and research-based argument strategies developed in PWR 1 through more intensive work with oral, visual, and multimedia rhetoric;
- To identify, evaluate, and synthesize materials across a range of media and to explore how to present these materials effectively in support of the students' own arguments;
- To analyze the rhetoric of oral, visual, and multimedia documents with attention to how purpose, audience, and context help shape decisions about format, structure, and persuasive appeals;
- To learn to design appropriate and effective oral and multimedia texts;
- To conduct research appropriate to the specific documents being created;
- To reflect systematically on oral, visual, and multimedia rhetoric and writing.

We decided to pursue these goals through an assignment sequence that would be standard across our many different themed sections. We'd begin with an assignment we called "texts in translation," one that asked students to take a fairly brief text and translate it from one form of delivery to another, to analyze the rhetorical strategies operative in the two versions, and then present their findings to the class. This assignment would, we hoped, set the stage for a multimedia research-based argument, one that would include substantive

writing, research, collaboration, and delivery of the argument in one or more media. This assignment would take up five to six weeks of the course and might include various steps such as a proposal, documentation of research, several drafts, and the final live delivery of the research project. The final major project would ask students to create a reflective essay that essentially analyzed their work in the course and in which they noted how various media shaped their writing, how their rhetorical choices were affected by various media, how they used a new medium effectively in the presentation of research. This final meta-analysis would, we anticipated, often lead to a third major class presentation.

As an aside, let me say that, early on, we faced the challenge of how to allow our students to "draft" their presentations in the same way they draft print essays. To address this issue, we developed a core of undergraduate tutors, one or two of whom are attached to each section. The tutors, who take a special training course, observe and respond extensively to the students' practice presentations and help with taping the presentations for further discussion and analysis.

Now had we not been in such a state of euphoria, we would have noticed that this set of goals and assignments was, at the very least, daunting. And certainly our experience in trying to carry out one of our own assignments during a one-week institute held in September 2004 should have alerted us to the difficulty of what we were planning to do. We threw ourselves into teaching PWR 2 with abandon, however: in retrospect it's easy to see that we were to some extent dazzled by the possibilities presented to us, especially in the tech classrooms our academic technology specialist specially designed for the PWR 2 program. We and our students could do it all, we thought.

And indeed, we managed to do a lot. Teachers and students alike plunged into multimedia writing, producing films and videos, exten-

sive audio essays (which are currently aired every week on Stanford's campus radio station), and Web texts of all kinds. But our students helped to rein us in. In their evaluations and in the extensive focus group discussions we held with students following their experience in PWR 2, they told us in no uncertain terms that while they loved the opportunity to explore new media in writing and to push their writing in new directions, they weren't sure their *writing* had actually improved. (In other words, they knew they were learning something, but many of them wouldn't call it writing.) So caught up were they in the fine points of Audacity, a software program for editing audio essays, or the pleasures of iMovies or the production of a zine that the actual writing (or at least what students understood as writing) in these endeavors seemed to suffer. Moreover, they noted with irritation that the class workload differed dramatically across sections and that some classes provided for very thorough instruction in presentation and for lots of "drafts" of oral/multimedia presentations, while others did not. In short, they echoed our own concerns. Midyear reflection told us we did not have this course really "down" yet, so we went back to the drawing board. In particular, our Curriculum Committee worked to address three major issues:

- How to balance academic with practical, real-world writing assignments;
- How to balance critique and analysis of multimedia rhetoric (skills most of us generally felt confident teaching) with practice in developing multimedia texts (here we felt less confident);
- How to balance technical training (ranging from PowerPoint to video production) with instruction in writing, rhetoric, and presentation.

We heard early on from upper administrators about their "horrible suspicion" that we might "just be teaching PowerPoint," on the one

hand, and on the other, from our Undergraduate Advisory Board about their near-violent disagreements over what constituted an effective PowerPoint presentation, much less on how to teach one. So we've been particularly interested to compare reactions to this newly required second course to what we hear about PWR 1, the more "traditional" first-year course. While some students complain that our focus on research-based argument is too limiting, and that they want a chance to write more creatively or expressively, we don't hear complaints about how we define research-based argument in the context of a research university. It's in the context of PWR 2 that everyone—and no one—is an expert, and we feel as though we are hearing from every one of these folks.

With these points in mind, a group of us began to reconsider our course goals and decided to try to focus more on the role of writing and presentation in the course. We realized, for example, that just as we did not expect students in PWR 1 to conduct research at the level of graduate students, so we should not expect students in PWR 2 to create full-length films, videos, hypertexts, or other digital work at the level of students with specialized training in those areas. (Indeed, we were reminded politely, Stanford's new major in Film and Media Studies would be grappling with that advanced task.) Instead, we posited that PWR 2 should orient students to using media production as a means of persuasion in the way that PWR 1 accomplishes this task for research at the university level. What we had to remind ourselves (over and over again) was that the core values of PWR 2 entailed the teaching of rhetoric, research, argument, and *presentation* rather than advanced training in media production. The result of this rethinking and refocusing was fairly dramatic: almost to a person, we felt that our PWR 2 courses in the spring were far more

coherent and rigorous than the ones we had taught in the winter because they placed the delivery of a research-based argument at the center of the curriculum. And while we do not yet have student evaluations for these classes, we are hopeful that students will have noted the differences as well.

When we began our work on PWR 2, we thought that redefining writing (as highly mediated) and developing a new vocabulary for communicative literacies would yield to careful observation: if students just looked around, we thought, and took note of what writing looks like today and how it functions—then the need for new definitions and terms would become apparent enough to them. Our current version of the latest "new" rhetoric would be born. How naïve could we be! Redefining terms or creating a "new rhetoric and writing" is one thing: realizing and fully implementing any such redefinitions is quite another. Indeed, we have learned that teaching writing based on a substantive redefinition of writing affects every single aspect of our work: our theories of writing and rhetoric, our curriculum, our classroom configurations, our staffing, training, evaluation principles and procedures, our relationships with other programs (and with upper administration), and our methods and materials. We know, for instance, that traditional and familiar theories of writing have not focused on the material conditions of production or the inclusion of aural and visual elements (what we have nicknamed the "three v's": vocal, visual, verbal) at every stage of the writing process, much less on effective ways to perform the knowledge produced during those stages. And while the field of rhetoric and writing has led the way in how best to assess traditional forms of academic writing, we are now engaged in the complex work of assessing forms of digital, multimedia, and performed writing.

We have even had to rethink our methods, from how we use collaboration in the classroom and teach research to how we respond to students and their writing (or spriting).

We of course are not the only ones struggling with this set of complex issues. In a blog entry on screencasting as the new first-year composition, C. G. Brooke takes up a question Jon Udell poses and turns it around. Rather than ask, as Udell does, "Would I really suggest that techies . . . become fluid storytellers not only in the medium of the written essay, but also in the medium of the narrated screencast?" Brooke asks "Would I really suggest that first-year composition take up the challenge of meeting those techies halfway, as well as the challenge of questioning our assumptions about the scope of writing?" to which he answers "Hell yes." This is the challenge my colleague Eric Miraglia raised for us this year: how to fulfill our Faculty Senate's mandate to "teach effective writing and speaking" while allowing students an opportunity for "authoring in the most compelling discursive modalities of their generation."

There is no doubt in my mind that these "compelling discursive modalities"—Web texts, films, radio essays, multimedia presentations—are here to stay and that they, in fact, constitute the heart of what students of a new rhetoric need to learn and practice. But moving in this direction will not be easy. First, we need to remember the power of the old rhetoric, and indeed to understand that the new modalities our students are practicing are in some ways echoes of the scene of writing and speaking in fifth-century BCE Greece, when the oral performance of discourse took precedence. But we also need to remember the power and history of print textuality: the era of the book may be closing, but the power of print remains. The challenge for those professing writing and rhetoric today lies in facing

such tensions and finding ways to honor them even as we attempt to move beyond them. Doing so seems to me much more important than deciding on whether writing and rhetoric should be housed in a new and separate department or even arguing over whether there is or is not a "new" rhetoric. Perhaps the wisest course of action is to recognize that where there is language there will always be rhetoric, and that rhetoric will inevitably renew itself with each succeeding generation.

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Two

NOTES ON LANGUAGE WARS IN THE USA

Contemporary writer bell hooks says that "language is a place of struggle" (146), and these simple words carry great wisdom. Throughout history, people have struggled over who should have access to what kinds of language and over the ways language has been used to privilege some and disenfranchise others. Within U.S. history, the struggle over language has been intense since the time of first contact with Native Americans, and such struggles continue to surround us today.

During the years since that first contact, English has played a pivotal role in national identity, a role that has often pitted English against any and all other languages. Some feel that America has now turned its sights on the whole world, aiming to make English the "universal" or global language. This is a claim that is hotly debated, with those on one side noting, for example, that English is already the working language of 98 percent of German research physicists and the official language of the European Central Bank—in short, well on its way to being *the* global language. Others argue that, in fact, the United States is now a fully multilingual country, that the

total predominance of English is beginning to wane in it, and that by the year 2050 Chinese will still be the most spoken language in the world, with Spanish and Arabic becoming as common as English. If, however, the place of English on the global scene is by no means certain, the English language itself is certain to persist well into the foreseeable future, and, indeed, it may be one of only a handful of languages to do so.

Thus for many linguists, the "war" over global English pales into insignificance compared to the alarming rate at which the world's languages are being lost. There is little danger, in short, that U.S. national identity will be threatened by a loss of English—but the same cannot be said for many of the world's linguistic communities. So concerned are a number of scholars that they have created the Foundation for Endangered Languages and authorities like David Crystal, linguist and author of numerous books as well as editor of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* and *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, contribute regularly to this group's fund-raising efforts.

In *Language Death*, Crystal sounds a strong warning:

> It doesn't take a language long to disappear, once the spirit to continue with it leaves its community. In fact, the speed of the decline has been one of the main findings of recent linguistic research. Take Aleut, the language of the Aleutian Islands, west of Alaska, surviving mainly in just one village. In 1990 there were 60 speakers left; by 1994 there were just 44, the youngest in their 20s. If that rate of decline continues, Aleut will be gone by 2010. (16)

Noting that of the world's six thousand languages, one is dying about every two weeks, Crystal goes on to say that five hundred languages

today have fewer than one hundred speakers and fifteen hundred languages have fewer than one thousand speakers (14–15). "If we continue the analysis downward," says Crystal, "we would eventually find that just four percent of the world's languages are spoken by ninety-six percent of the population. [But] turn this statistic on its head: ninety-six percent of the world's languages are spoken by just four percent of the population" (14).

I often open my class on the subject of "language wars" with Crystal's work, and I find that almost all of my students are astonished to find that languages are dying out. I am additionally surprised when I discover that many of them see little cause for alarm. In fact, when they learn that some linguists believe that the world's languages may be reduced to only a few, they sometimes see that as good news, thinking that then everyone would be able to communicate with ease. I have to do some work to ask them to reconsider what is lost when a language dies and, especially, whether communication would indeed be enhanced if we had only one or two languages. Only slowly do I introduce them to Crystal's claim that "if that happens, it will be the greatest intellectual disaster that the planet has ever known" (viii). Then I ask them to question the basis of their assumption: why would having fewer languages lead to better understanding? After all, a near-monolingual country like the United States seems no nearer to common ground and common understanding than a country whose citizens speak several different languages.

The question in my class eventually turns to where students stand on linguistic pluralism, to whether they believe languages and the cultures they carry are valuable in and of themselves, to whether they think all languages deserve respect. These issues have been

hotly debated throughout American history. At its official founding, of course, the United States was a country of many languages, and there were many Indian languages already in place as well. In fact, there was even some debate about what the preferred language of the United States should be, especially as it worked very hard to distinguish itself from Britain. Indeed, an urban legend persists that German immigrants had such an impact on their new country that a proposal was seriously aired to replace English with German as a way of emphasizing the break with England and that this proposal lost by one vote (see Dennis Baron's essay "The Legendary English-Only Vote of 1795" for the story of what really happened and how the legend arose). Other replacements for English that were suggested included Hebrew (linked to the "original language of Eden"), French (the language "of logic and rationality"), and Greek ("for the location of the first democracy") (Baron, "Lingua Blanka").

My students find these stories hard to believe, and with good reason, for English quickly became a key term in the national identity of the United States and a key means of assimilating—or colonizing—others. In *Introducing English*, James Slevin argues that "suppressing or erasing cultural multiplicity has been a purpose of English education in the Americas from the very beginning" (102). In support of this controversial claim, Slevin tells the bizarre story of Henrico College, a university intended to educate the children of "those barbarians," the tidewater Virginia Powhatan Indians. Within only a couple of years of arriving at this early Virginia settlement, that is, the settlers seized on a mission—to teach the Indians to speak English. That they persevered in this endeavor is remarkable: they were beset with bad weather and disease; they had barely enough to eat; they were living close to the edge of existence. And yet they

decided to build a college to teach Indians English. Here's how Virginia archival records report this adventure:

> During the height of the Citie of Henricus, the colony founded the first hospital in North America, Mt. Malady, and the first school, Henrico College. Servants were granted land and freedom—the beginning of the first private ownership of land, the future free enterprise system and democratic economy that made America unique throughout the world. . . . The Henricus colony flourished until 1622, when Powhatan's successor, Opechancanough, killed one-third of the colony's population and burned the settlement. Remaining survivors moved to the plantations that had been established throughout the area. ("Historic Chesterfield County")

The settlers set to the task of teaching the "barbarians," converting them from one culture to another, literally "translating" them into English speakers and bearers of English culture. (Pocahontas, daughter of the Powhatan chief who was kidnapped and later married to an Englishman, was described as "the first Virginian ever spake English" by John Smith and made into an exemplary object of study by the English when she was taken to England on a "tour," a tour that, incidentally, killed her.) But it's clear the Powhatans were not perfectly content with this new culture and language into which they were being initiated: on March 22, 1622, the Powhatans came to visit their English neighbors and, as Slevin puts it, "using primarily the tools and weapons of the English, they executed as many men, women, and children as they could find, killing over one quarter of the English population" (119).

This is but one event in the history of English in the United States, but it is particularly instructive in that it occurred so early

in the seventeenth century, well before the Revolution and founding of the country, after which further efforts to "civilize" the native inhabitants only increased in number and in violence. The Henrico College story, then, is emblematic of the intercultural conflict present at the birth of "America" and this particular language war persists powerfully today.

We can see one of its embodiments in the English Only movement, founded, ironically enough, by S. I. Hayakawa, scholar of language and former senator who was himself of Japanese heritage. In 1981, Hayakawa introduced a constitutional amendment to the U.S. Congress, the purpose of which was to declare English the "official" language of the United States. The amendment was never passed, yet since then, twenty-three states, nearly half of the country, have enacted such laws. The Web site for U.S. English, whose motto is "toward a united America," is one of the most outspoken advocates of "English only"—in fact, not just any old English but U.S. English!

Prominent on the Web site are these words from Theodore Roosevelt: "The one absolute certain way to bring this nation to ruin, or preventing all possibility of its continuing as a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities. We have but one flag. We must also learn one language and that language is English." If you go to the U.S. English Web site, you will not only see the outline of the United States but also hear an emotion-laden rendition of the national anthem in the background. This site is dedicated to "preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States," and it offers multiple ways for citizens to get involved in the work of establishing a national language policy of "English only." In the view of U.S. English, the English language is

the key ingredient in our identity. The *best* citizens, this site assumes, by default speak English.

At least one group is attempting to counter the English Only movement in the United States. "English Plus," as it is known, advocates the teaching of multiple languages and a policy of linguistic pluralism for the United States and offers compelling counterarguments drawn from such multilingual societies as Canada and Switzerland. But this group, which is supported by professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, is much smaller and, importantly, has much less money than the very rich English Only movement.

If my students do not know the story of Henrico College—and they don't—they also know little about language policy in the United States or about the English Only movement and its alternatives. Only if the issue has had a strong local impact, as it has in California, are they aware of what is at stake in this particular language war. Once they are informed about it, however, they become very interested in the debate and invested in its outcomes. Some of the most productive debates in my class grow out of our study of the English Only movement; even students who strongly identify with one side or the other will begin to reconsider their stands as they listen to the arguments of their classmates and as they learn more about the way any language (and in this case, especially English) can be used not just to organize people but to dominate them.

When I think of the success the English Only movement has had in the United States, I am personally deeply disheartened. I think of my colleague Guadalupe Valdes, professor of Spanish and education at Stanford, saying that she associates visiting local schools with "watching the light go out in the eyes of Hispanic children" as they

are continually silenced. This is one of my major reasons for teaching the "language wars" course and focusing on the issue of linguistic pluralism; I believe that we must embrace multiple languages, that our official language policy must be pluralistic, and that the teaching of language—and especially English—must be divorced from moral crusades to create "ideal" or "best" citizens.

Nowhere has this scene of battle been more evident than in the absolute furor that took place over what is now widely referred to as the Ebonics uproar. "Ebonics," a term coined in the 1970s by combining ebony and phonics, is a powerful and colorful variety of English with its own rules of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and style (Baugh 15–24). In 1996, a school board in largely black Oakland, California, passed a resolution in favor of recognizing Ebonics as the home language of most of its children and of trying to work from where the children were, linguistically, toward where the schools wanted them to go. Almost immediately, a huge outcry began on television and in the press, attacking the school board and, especially, any recognition of Ebonics. Congressional hearings were held on the subject and linguistic scholars weighed in, trying to explain that African American Vernacular English (Ebonics) is a legitimate variety of American English with a long history and a huge number of practitioners. Critics were having none of this: "Ebonics is totally ridiculous," said one outraged senator, and even some well-known African Americans got into the act. Speaking at an occasion honoring the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Bill Cosby shocked members of his Howard University audience by saying "they're standing on the corner and they can't speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk: 'Why you ain't?' 'Where you is?' . . . And I blamed the kid until I heard the

mother talk. And then I heard the father talk. . . . Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads" (qtd. in Coates). Thus what had seemed a reasoned pedagogical goal of starting where children are and moving them toward a new goal began to look like an act of lunacy.

In the years since the 1996 Oakland School Board decision, this debate has continued almost unabated. What I find troubling about this language war is related to what bothers me about the other skirmishes I have been describing: it is yet another instance of narrow-mindedness, of rejecting difference or diversity, of attempts to fit all people in the United States into one "unified" mold and to get them to speak one "unified" language, the so-called standard. In fact, "standard" English is itself not so standard. William F. Buckley, Bill Clinton, and Toni Morrison all speak standard English—but think of the very wide range that such a standard encompasses.

Thus far my remarks about the struggles around language issues in the United States have been quite negative, and as I've acknowledged, the current situation is fairly depressing to me. But I do see some signs of countermovements, of people working toward much more openness in language and language use. The English Plus movement is a good example of a grassroots effort that is still building and that has the potential, at least, to provide not only an alternative to "English only" but, more important, a platform from which to explain the severe problems—politically, educationally, even aesthetically—with monolingualism, especially of the almost messianic kind that characterizes the rhetoric of the English Only movement.

Thus in my class on language wars, we turn toward the end of the term to some of the struggles to challenge old standards and to

liberalize and pluralize attitudes toward language use. One result of what in the United States is called the "canon wars"—that is, the effort to make the literary tradition inclusive of the work of women and people of color and to allow for the study and appreciation of both "high" and "low" culture—has been a great growth of work in new and often quite experimental genres. Hypertextual novels such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* provide a good example. In this dense story, authored by "Mary/Shelley & Herself," Mary Shelley rather than Dr. Frankenstein makes a female monster and they travel together to the United States. "Perhaps the true paradigmatic work of the [current] era," says novelist Robert Coover in praising it, "Shelley Jackson's elegantly designed, beautifully composed *Patchwork Girl* offers the patient reader, if there are any left in the world, [the] experience of losing oneself to a text, for as one plunges deeper and deeper into one's own personal exploration of the relations here of creator to created and of body to text, one never fails to be rewarded and so is drawn ever deeper, until clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page, and much less constraining, more compelling" ("Patchwork Girl").

But the most prominent of these new forms is surely the graphic novel, which is making a name for itself as an important and legitimate genre, as evidenced not only by a huge outpouring of novels but also by Peter Schjeldahl's 2005 *New Yorker* essay on the genre and by the featuring of a panel from Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* on the cover of the October 2004 *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)*. Contemporary graphic novels are, of course, related to the comic book tradition; in fact, Art Spiegelman, winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for his two-

volume graphic novel *Maus*, has for some time been giving a lecture ("Comix 101") on college campuses about the history of comics and the development of what he sees as a very serious art form. In the lecture, he gives a chronological tour of the development of comics and argues for the value of the medium in what he calls a postliterate culture. Comics (or what I'm calling graphic novels) are on the rise, he says, because "they echo the way the brain works. People think in iconographic images, not in holograms, and people think in bursts of language, not paragraphs" (Spiegelman). *Maus* is the graphic novel I most often use to introduce students to the genre and to the language wars raging around the form, and at first they are highly resistant to reading a "comic" about the Holocaust. But the portrayal of Jews as mice and Nazis as cats, and the remarkable narrative of his parents' survival and of their lives in America soon captivates them.

Graphic novels are amazingly varied in style, tone, and content, and range from Eric Drucker's *Blood Song*, which has not a single word in it, to the extremely verbal work of Lynda Barry. I often teach Barry's *One! Hundred! Demons!*, concentrating with my students on the controversy it has generated in the academy. The novel looks like a scrapbook of some kind, one put together by a teenager, and Barry herself labels it an "autobifictionalography."

But like *Maus*, *One! Hundred! Demons!* has a very serious story to tell, and students again are sometimes jarred by the contrast between the form and the content of this text. And on the question of "quality," they are of several minds. Many more conservative students do not see such forms as literature, do not see them as worthy of that name. For them, the standard classics are what count as "real"

literature. Other students are excited by the possibilities of this new form, intrigued by the way narrative structures change within it, and passionate about its importance. Still others don't know yet know what they think about graphic novels but are open to exploring them.

Of course, the rise of the graphic novel is, as Spiegelman notes, related to the rise of the image in Western culture (see Shlain and Stephens) and to the digital revolution that has made producing books like Barry's fairly simple and straightforward. I also see this trend in conjunction with the striking number of works being written in "mixed" languages (by such writers as Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Denise Chavez) as a sign that the English Only language police will not ultimately be successful, that the kind of linguistic pluralism I am advocating will have a chance to take hold in the United States. And so I teach these works, always, in my classes.

I also teach examples of academic writing that are at war with tradition and the "standard" way of making academic arguments. And this is a war that particularly fascinates and captivates my students, since many of them are struggling to fit themselves into the styles and structures of academic disciplines. To their credit, they want to learn traditional academic styles and structures; they want to be fluent in the rhetoric of academic discourse just as they want to be fluent in English. But they want *much* more. Indeed, they resent being made to feel that any other way of writing is less than legitimate, and thus they are thrilled when they see an academic writer taking chances and writing "outside the box." As it turns out, writers often feel the same resentment. Well-known novelist and essayist Michelle Cliff, for instance, speaks of the straitjacket she felt she

had to wear in her writing for the PhD and of the results of that experience:

> The first piece of writing I produced, beyond a dissertation on intellectual game-playing in the Italian Renaissance, was entitled "Notes on Speechlessness," published in *Sinister Wisdom*, no. 5. In it I talked about my identification with the wild boy of Aveyron, who, after his rescue from the forest and wildness by a well-meaning doctor of Enlightenment Europe, became "civilized," but never came to speech. I felt, with Victor, that my wildness had been tamed—that which I had been taught was my wildness. ("A Journey" 273)

Even the traditionally staid *New Yorker* has begun publishing works like Jonathan Safran Foer's "A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease," a moving essay that employs dozens of invented punctuation marks that may help (or hinder) communication among members of his family (the spiderweb is only one of these intriguing "punctuation marks").

Cliff and Foer are not in the academy, but there are many scholars today who are also resisting the "standard" academic discourse, perhaps most notably Jane Tompkins in her now infamous article called "Me and My Shadow," in which she alternates between an academic critique of an article by Ellen Messer-Davidow and personal narrative about her life and her dislike of academese. Such works push against the boundaries of what is acceptable in traditional academic discourse, bringing in personal experience, colloquial language, other languages and dialects, and direct address. Such efforts are by no means limited to those in the discipline of literature: other scholars in history, legal theory, and even philosophy are beginning to stretch the genre of academic prose.

These efforts are still quite controversial. In fact, the myriad responses to Jane Tompkins's article were primarily critical. So I don't foresee this particular language war being decided any time in the near future. But it does seem obvious that the technology of writing has undergone a series of amazing changes since the advent of the computer, making such experimentation easier and eventually perhaps more acceptable. In the meantime, students are using digital media to produce experimental discourse almost daily, and they are finding themselves caught up in yet another language controversy. I don't know if you have seen the online language known as *l33t* (short for "elite"), but I was quite taken aback by it when I first saw it. It is widely used among young people, who seem almost to have formed a kind of cult: those who know and are fluent in "leet" are "in" while those who don't are decidedly out. This and other examples like it have grown up from the use of handheld communication devices, which often didn't have a full keyboard of characters and where space was a premium; as a result, writers improvised and took shortcuts. Some of these new ways have now been codified into very elaborate systems of talk like l33t; others are in no way systematic. But this kind of communication has caused yet another furor in schools where, once again, U.S. teachers are more often than not demanding "standard" English only. Headlines like "Nu Shortcuts in School R 2 Much 4 Teachers" have become common as writers and journalists take on the question of whether such linguistic experimentation is harmful and whether or not it should be stamped out (Lee). Here, too, students are of quite differing opinions. Some argue that versatility is the key and that they are aware enough of the rhetorical principal of *kairos* to make good decisions about when and where to use differing varieties of language. Others take a quite rigid ap-

proach to "right" and "wrong" and put such experimentation firmly in the "wrong" category.

Finally, I do not see it as my job to make students' minds up for them but rather to make them aware of the nature and scope of the language controversies currently at work in U.S. culture—and in their lives—and to ask them to think hard about the role language and rhetoric play in the formation of who they are as well as in what their country will be. Such need to put a spotlight on "language wars" and especially on efforts to dominate others through the use of language (as the English Only policies clearly attempt to do) is especially important in the United States today, so I usually end my class with intense discussions and debates about the current governmental rhetoric. Students quickly note, for example, that the Bush government's tendency to see the world in terms of dichotomies (good versus evil, "us" against "them") is part of a language war as well, and one in which the stakes for all of us are very high. It's more than high time, then, that we attend carefully and consistently to the language wars around us and that we learn to participate in them in the most constructive ways possible.

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Three

"AUTHORITY" IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

"Authority" is a troubled term today, I wish to argue, precisely because of the ethical issues it raises for teachers of writing and reading. I hope to foreground what I take to be the crux of these issues by sketching in two very different scenes. In the first, two bright and talented graduate students are reflecting on "authority." One remarks that he has dropped the term altogether from his statement of teaching philosophy: "I spent most of the term writing in my journal about ethical issues of authority—my authority in the classroom, the authority of published authors, the authority of academic discourse, and so on. It occurred to me . . . that the term authority carried with it, at least in my mind, negative connotations. It suggests a top-down pedagogy, where the teacher and his pet theorists are in the know and students are in need of enlightenment" (Grey). Another student preparing for a research project on writing worries about the ethics of ethnographic techniques, knowing that interpretation inevitably involves some degree of appropriation. "For this reason," she says, "I believe it is important to

share our stories and interpretations with informants, to negotiate with them in the construction and telling. This is a practice that, I'm embarrassed to admit, I don't often carry out when I write essays. For as much as I fear and question my own authority and interpretations, I don't hand them over to others easily. The fact that other interpretations may differ significantly from my own is both frightening and disconcerting to me; this fear largely results from my conservative religious upbringing where interpretations were not negotiable, where certain interpretations (mainly the interpretations of men) were authoritative and privileged, and all others were deemed wrong" (Goldthwaite).

Compare these two graduate students' thoughts on the ethics of teacherly authority to the following paraphrase of a college president's remarks at a national conference on ethics and teaching. "I love authority," he said, and he went on to say that he used authority "powerfully" in all his classrooms, as did those great teachers that he held in such high regard, and that students "better all know this" before they take his course. Whereas the graduate student teachers were wary of "authority" because it represents, potentially, power over others (and particularly over students), the president suggests that such authoritative power, if based on respect due deep knowledge and experience, can be used appropriately to inspire students. Now presidents are by definition in positions of extraordinary power while graduate student teachers are not, but I pass over the remarkable power differential at work here to focus instead on these two competing senses in which "authority" can inform classroom teaching, for the operative definition will contribute substantially to the ethos of any class and may in fact be the most significant factor in

establishing that ethos. In the remarks that follow, I intend to trace my own understandings of the term "authority," to reflect on how negative associations with "authority" can work against our best efforts at establishing ethical classroom communities, and to suggest that unless we can recuperate a positive idea of authority—as a source of knowledge and experience we can and should respect—we may be better off to eschew the term altogether.

In "On Authority in the Study of Writing," Gesa Kirsch and Peter Mortensen offer an extremely valuable analysis of the term "authority," review feminist critiques of the term and its practices, and argue that those in composition studies should try to move "beyond a notion of authority based on autonomy, individual rights, and abstract rules" and toward a classroom model and a classroom ethos "based on dialogue, connectedness, and contextual rules" (557). That is to say, we should try to enact a model that would combine the best of the president's vision of authority with the best of the graduate students' thinking on how to act responsibly in terms of our own classroom authority. Indeed, on the face of it, such a move should be possible, at least definitionally, for—as Hannah Arendt notes—the word "authority" is related etymologically to Latin terms for "augment" ("augere," meaning "to make to grow, to promote or increase") and, of course, "originate" (as in the word "author"). These terms all suggest connection and reciprocity. As a 1602 text has it (with an early use of the word "author" in English), "a good God may not aucthor noysome things." That is to say, a "good God," who claims our deepest respect, may not "nurture, make grow, or augment" noysome things. But as Kirsch and Mortensen also point out, this sense of authority as an act of nurturing or augmenting long ago

gave way to authority as associated with radical individualism and with various forms of discursive and institutional power.[1]

As these remarks suggest, I, like a number of other scholars in composition (Berlin, Bizzell, Clark, Clark and Ede, and Shor, for example), have been thinking about authority and our and our students' relationships to it, for some time now, and the occasion of this address has allowed me an opportunity to think at least briefly about the stages my thinking has gone through in relationship to this concept. I should perhaps say flatly that I do not—as a woman, as a teacher, or as a researcher positioned as I am in an elite institution of higher education—have any definitive "answers" to the problem of authority. Indeed, my relationship to the term seems to me more conflicted than ever before. When I first started working on a draft of these remarks, for example, I sat down and wrote a series of journal entries in which I tried to trace my shifting understandings of and attempts at enactments of classroom authority—from the late sixties when I first began to teach, through my PhD-seeking years, and on to my teaching and administering experiences since then. I found, somewhat to my chagrin, that I have been fairly predictable in my relationship to the concept of "authority": in the sixties and early seventies, I assumed authority was something outside of me, something that, with a lot of luck, I as a teacher of writing could find and perhaps even borrow, something I had learned to assume was politically and ideologically neutral. In the midseventies and early eighties, I struggled to find ways to inhabit authority, both as a woman and as a member of the beleaguered field of composition studies—and I sought to help students inhabit authority as well. As I became more and more preoccupied with acts of collaboration

and with feminist and poststructuralist critiques, I sought to reject traditional notions of authority, too often, as I think now, by a kind of simple substitution through inversion. Studying Foucault reminded me, however, that "notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author [and authority] actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning" of these terms (143). And close encounters of a teacherly kind brought Foucault's message home to me in a number of professional and personal ways. As a result, I found myself venting in my journal, "I'm more confused—and I'm certainly more irritated—with the term 'authority' than I have ever been. How can I build the kind of classroom ethos I value, one based on dialogue and mutual respect and give-and-take, on connectedness and sharing, if the negative dynamics of authority-as-power undercut my very best efforts? Why is authority causing me so much grief?!?"

As I've thought of the term and its many associations, I've come to locate the "trouble with authority" in relation to three particular problems (for another explication of this troubling term, see Kathleen B. Jones's "The Trouble with Authority"). First, authority is tied historically, politically, and perhaps irrevocably to the "author construct." As Martha Woodmansee has been telling us since at least 1984, this "author construct"—which grew up in seventeenth-century Europe—depended on a definition of "author" as originary creator of unique works. Indeed, as Linda Brodkey, Rebecca Howard, Lisa Ede, and I have long argued, our society generally continues to think of "authorship" as solitary and originary and to protect this construct with an amazingly intricate and seemingly endless patchwork of copyright and patent legislation, with narrower

and narrower interpretations of "fair use" and "public space," with continuing emphasis on "original" contributions to scholarship or "original" student work, and with stringent proscriptions against plagiarism.[2] Thus the author construct and its ally authority have been linked to conceptions of property and individuality in the capitalist West since the founding of our republic.

Mounting a critique on the "author construct" has been an ongoing part of postmodern and poststructuralist projects for some time now, heralded perhaps by the dramatic announcement of the "death of the author"(whose demise, as it turns out, was greatly exaggerated) by Roland Barthes in 1968 and the lengthy autopsy performed by Michel Foucault, who argued that it is more appropriate to speak of author "functions" than of authors and to see these functions as contested sites in a complex world of political, scientific, cultural, economic, ideological, and other forces. As the work of Kirsch and Mortensen makes clear, a concomitant critique of teacherly "authority" has been ongoing and has attempted to realize and interrogate a series of "authority functions" and in some ways to invoke a sense of authority that is free—or at least partially free—from the handicaps and ideological baggage of the "author."

But to date, at least, it hasn't worked. As a result, any number of theorists have noted the compelling and persuasive tendency to continue to link "authority" to autonomous individualism, to a unique, stable, and unified self who creates. In short, in spite of efforts to the contrary (such as Kirsch and Mortensen's), "authority" seems still to be figured predominantly as radically individual and as masculine. To the extent that authority is bound to authorship, then, it is tied, as I have just tried to argue, to radical individualism in the Western world, to the kind of individualism that has

led us to valorize the genius in the garret, the lone ranger in the saddle, the Marlboro man riding west in countless commercials, the iconoclast in the mass media who will "do it my way." That in our culture this individual should be overwhelmingly masculine is no surprise to any of us. Nor is it a surprise that authority has persistently, in the West, been figured as masculine. As Kathleen Jones notes, "the standard analysis of authority in modern Western political theory" has always "excluded females and values associated with the feminine" ("On Authority" 152).[3] So the second major problem with "authority," in my mind at least, is that it is still, for all intents and purposes, individual, masculine, and therefore exclusionary. In our society, authority functions as judgmental and as hierarchical.

Judgment, hierarchy, and exclusion call up a third major problem with authority: its aim, in the West, has traditionally been to control or to gain power over others. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first meaning of the word as "power to enforce obedience." As Kathleen Jones puts it, the "standard view of authority is of a mode of discourse that gives expression to rank, order, definition, and distinction. . . . In Western political philosophy it is common to regard authority as a distinctive type of social control" or even force ("On Authority" 155–56). It would take more time and space than I have here, or than I would want to take, to trace the historical deployment of authority as power over others—and of power that is individual and masculine and, of course, "authorized." I have wished to invoke these troubling aspects or what I've been calling the "problems" with authority, however, not to trace their histories or their intricate linkages but to suggest that, taken as a triumvirate, these "problems"—Western conceptions of authorship,

of masculine, exclusionary individualism, and of power relationships as hierarchical and judgmental—these "problems" are the very things that have made authority in many ways ideal as an informing metaphor for traditional classrooms. Only in the last twenty years or so have teachers of writing and reading come to question that metaphor, to question what that metaphor means for continuing to view our classrooms as places in which teaching or learning has even a slim chance of occurring. As Henry Giroux remarked in a 1994 issue of *The Journal of Advanced Composition*, "the emergence of the electronic media coupled with a diminishing faith in the power of human agency has undermined the traditional visions of schooling and the meaning of pedagogy. The language of lesson plans and upward mobility and the forms of teacher authority on which it was based has been radically delegitimized by the recognition that culture and power are central to the authority/knowledge relationship" (360).

As scholar/teachers as different as Giroux, Susan Miller, Jim Berlin, Lisa Ede, John Trimbur, and Anne Gere have pointed out, our classrooms have been built on—and have valorized—individualism, ranking, hierarchy, and therefore—we have belatedly come to understand—exclusion. And they have been sites for the deployment of power and control over what Giroux calls the "authority/knowledge relationship." Every time we "place" students, every time we "CLEP" or "exempt" students, every time we give a grade—we are deploying traditional authority and using power in traditional ways to authorize certain kinds of knowledge and to deauthorize others. Recognition of this fact of academic life has led not only to a serious and ongoing critique of the ethics of institutional authority/power but also to

attempts to refigure authority and to develop new relationships, new ways of being in the classroom and in the academy. Many of these attempts have been carried out by feminist theorists and teachers, and it is their work that Kirsch and Mortensen draw on in searching for a model of authority based on dialogue, connectedness, and context (557); that Kathleen Jones draws on in attempting to think of authority "not as border-patrolling, boundary-engendering, but as meaning-giving . . . and gift-giving" ("Trouble" 123); that David Bleich draws on in attempting to define the classroom as a space in which socially generous research takes place among teachers and students; that Patrocinio Schweickart draws on in working on an ethics of care; that John Trimbur draws on in an attempt to distinguish between authority and authoritarianism; that Lisa Ede and Suzanne Clark draw on in their work on student resistance; that Anne Gere draws on in sketching the outlines of a "group ethic" for the classroom; and that I too have drawn on in trying to contribute to a refiguring of authority.

We badly need these and similar efforts. Indeed, I would say that we desperately need them. As I have studied these efforts, I've come to see some common themes and commonalities among the attempts to refigure authority. Stated briefly, the teachers and scholars I have read and talked to all seem to be reaching beyond classroom models based on traditional conceptions of authority to define not a classroom *authority* but a classroom *ethos* based on dialogism and connection (and hence struggle) rather than on hierarchy and order; on constructions of a person as a range of selves that are materially situated rather than as a stable and autonomous individual; on aims of exploration, reflexivity, and

negotiation rather than on power and control. If we are to recuperate "authority" for our classrooms at all, it seems to me clear that these common themes must be pursued.

As Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy point out, however, such recuperation will be anything but easy. In a fascinating study of "Community in the Expressivist Classroom," Fishman and McCarthy trace a series of distinctions between liberal and communitarian concepts and uses of authority. Analyzing the confused and sometimes conflicting uses of these differing constructs of authority in his own classrooms, Fishman concludes that the two kinds of authority "can work together," but that they often "work at cross purposes" (70). I am grateful for Fishman and McCarthy's careful analysis and critique, for it suggests by example the degree to which attempts at refiguring authority will not necessarily—perhaps even cannot—undo but may instead only disguise or suppress the masculine individualism, traditional ideas of authorship, and the desire for control. As Chandra Mohanty points out, these efforts at refiguring often work against a teacher's own best intentions, precisely because she is unable to cut the ties between authority and Western hierarchical individualism. As Mohanty says in "On Race and Voice," for example, "classrooms based on . . . collaboration often continue to see groups as collections of individuals, as essentially an aggregate of units that ideally embody difference." One important "ideological effect of this," she goes on to say, "is the standardization of behaviors and responses so as to make them predictable (and thus manageable) across a wide variety of situations and circumstances. If complex structural experiences of domination and resistance can be ideologically reformulated as individual behaviors and attitudes, they can be managed while carrying on business as usual" (157–58).

Anne Gere makes a similar point when she says that "it is possible to adopt pedagogical practices [like collaboration, for example] without adopting the assumptions that underlie them. . . . [Such] discontinuities between approaches based on different theories create problems for any group of students, but they pose particular difficulties for women and people of color who typically stand at the margins of academic discourse. . . . Conflicted approaches can undermine the tenuous confidence of these persons who often occupy the newest and most vulnerable positions in the academy" (Remarks).

So we shouldn't fool ourselves that creating new models of authority, new spaces for students and teachers to experience nonhierarchical, shared authority, is a goal we can hope to reach in any sort of straightforward way. To make the difficulties we face as concrete as possible, I wish to offer three homegrown stories. The first concerns the perceptions that undergraduates may bring to the classroom regarding authority. I had an opportunity once to ask a large group of undergraduates to consider—very briefly—the word "authority" and to jot down the first things that came to mind when they heard that term. Consider the following representative sample.

With almost no exceptions, students associated the word "authority" with either an individual or with an abstract idea or feeling. Among persons, the most often associated with "authority" were these: *the police, principals, parents, teachers, bosses, government officials, dictators (one student said flatly, "authority is Adolf Hitler"), fathers, and government "big guys."* Some students were more detailed in their descriptions of these "authorities." One, for instance, says that authority calls up the image of "a high strung man giving me

directions," while another says "a man who tells you what to do, when to do it, and how to do it."

"When I hear the word 'authority,'" another student says, "I think of a person who is in control of me and who is mean and unfair."

"My first image of the word 'authority' is a police officer—or maybe an older person, all bent over and pointing a long finger at a younger person."

"The first thing I think of is a tall, deep-voiced person telling me what to do." And, finally, a response that particularly intrigued me: "Authority: someone I would never, ever, ever date."

Those students who focused on ideas and feelings called up similar negative images: "Authority makes me think of being in trouble—big time." "Something I don't have," said another. And one student simply wrote in large all capital letters: "BAD, DEMEANING, UGH." Several others suggest the same theme: "I hate authority; it scares me; it's no good." "Authority: the ability to manipulate people like me into doing what they want, even when I don't want to." "A sense of control, of being on a pedestal over others"; "Authority causes fear"; and "Authority is power that is abused."

In the hundreds of these student responses I read over, I found only half a dozen that carried positive connotations of any kind; I found none that mentioned people who were perceived to be supportive or helpful; I found none that identified themselves in any way as having authority or even wanting it; I found none that mentioned women. It would be a mistake to make any particular claims based on this random and haphazard group of responses. In fact, I am not interested in generalizing or in trying to make claims about what these students report except to say that for these students, at

least, all of our efforts to empower, to allow students to share and to experience and to seize authority may be working against perceptions and attitudes that will be resistant to our strongest efforts. More troubling, perhaps, in some important ways they should be. For in one way at least, these students are dead on the mark: their associations with "authority" echo the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of the term; their experiences of it call up images of individuals who exercise control over them. In short, these students' perceptions epitomize the troubles with authority I've been trying to explore. But there's at least one more turn to this particular worm: insofar as students bring expectations about teachers and authority to our classes with them, they are probably expecting that we will live and act out their experience of authority: that we will use power to manipulate and control them. (And, as Linda Brodkey, Susan Miller, Sharon Crowley and others point out, in many ways we will.) These expectations, these deeply embedded perceptions of authority, mean that students who hold them will not easily be able to cede authority to teachers who act in ways that break their expectations. And if teachers cannot inhabit some form of efficacious authority in the classroom, they are not likely to be able to share it or to nurture it in others.

At one time in my career, it seemed reasonable enough to me to expect that the trouble with authority might disappear, or at least dissipate, in graduate classrooms. Another naïve expectation, as I discovered. A few years ago, some students in one of my graduate seminars studied the dynamic in our class, beginning with an analysis of the course description I had written and the strategies I proposed for sharing authority in the classroom (students worked

in groups, for instance, and were responsible for the direction class discussions took and for class activities; students also took turns monitoring the "process" or dynamics of the class, noting who spoke, who didn't, and so on, and offering reflections intended to reveal hierarchies at work). At the end of the seminar, two students conducted interviews of seminar members. What they found pointed out once again the "trouble with authority." As one student said, "This course was actually a very traditional seminar despite the underlying theory Andrea was promoting and the classroom ethic she advocated. Graduate students jockeyed for status and space/room to speak to the teacher. The students themselves were some of the most knowledgeable and most resistant to traditional pedagogies of control I know. Even so, the class as a whole reverted to the old approach: the teacher was the sole authority and held the power." Another said, "I sensed undercurrents of tension; the class supposedly shared power and authority, but I felt the instructor wasn't completely comfortable with that." And another—"Though I liked Andrea's attempts at decentering power/authority, I don't think it always worked—and it seemed sometimes Andrea wasn't even aware of that. I don't think we always took Andrea's offers seriously either—it's the way we are conditioned." And finally, "I have learned that it is very difficult to expose the political forces that threaten to undermine any learning situation, but unless a ceaseless attempt is made to do so, a 'liberatory' classroom can be more oppressive than one that never espouses such an ideal."

I was impressed at the time—and I am equally impressed now in recalling this study—that these graduate students were so thoughtfully self-reflective about the workings of our seminar; I am also impressed with how feeble my attempts were at establishing the kind

of classroom ethos I thought I was aiming for. And I am impressed by the fact that, for all their comments to the contrary, these students did feel sufficiently "authorized" to mount the critique they did—and to share it with me. But mostly I am struck by how their expectations and what one student called their "conditioning" as well as my own unacknowledged or unrecognized desires for power/authority constantly thwarted what we all thought we were trying to do.

Still more troubling to me are the students whose expectations lead them to see efforts to subvert and resist traditional patterns of authority and power as wrongheaded, as cop-outs, as, in fact, a cheat. In another seminar I taught—and a seminar in which I hoped to invest authority in all members of the group and to have talking time shared equally among us—one student confronted me very early on, almost in a rage. "What is this!" she demanded. "I didn't pay thousands of dollars to sit here and listen to my peers. You're the teacher. Teach!!" And of course, in at least one important way, she had a point. I was the teacher. I should teach. I did have, I hoped, something real, something of substance, to offer the members of my seminar. The issue for me was over *how* I would teach in ways that would not reify the most traditional concepts and expectations of authority as power and control over others.

Readers who have stayed with me this far may be feeling fairly depressed about the state of affairs surrounding authority in the classroom. On my bad days, I share that depression, for it seems to me in many ways that authority may be unrecoverable, too freighted with the problems outlined here to be of any use in building an ethical classroom environment. I'm tempted to say, with one of my student respondents, "I hate authority! Get rid of it!!" And perhaps we ought to give the term itself a rest, a time-out in our pedagogi-

cal and scholarly conversations, as did the graduate student whose reflections I quoted earlier. Later, that same student decided "to substitute 'presence' for 'authority,'" for in contrast to the highly negative connotations that worried him about the latter term, "presence," as he defines it, "seems less absolute, suggesting both positive and negative qualities of teacher and texts. Thus, as I rewrote my teaching philosophy, my 'authority' in the classroom became my 'presence' in the classroom, and the 'authority' of academic discourse became the 'presence' of academic discourse" (Grey).

Or perhaps we might turn to one of the word's earlier associations, to the sense of augmenting and giving and "making to grow," and explore these metaphors as the basis for what Anne Gere calls a community ethic. What I have in mind in such a move is putting not authority but *responsibility* at the heart of such an ethic, responsibility in the sense of taking responsibility for words and actions and positions in the classroom and in the sense of the ability to respond—respond-ability in the classroom. I am thinking in making such a move of all those students who identified authority as authority "over" someone or something. Might they think instead of responsibility *to*, of responsibility *for*, of responsibility *with*? If all members of a class agree or contract to take responsibility for their words, actions, and positions, then such responsibilities can become the basis for or sites of ongoing negotiation and for the construction of an ethical classroom community.

At the very least, if we cannot abandon the term "authority" (or if it will not abandon us), perhaps we can alternately succeed in disentangling it from *power*. As Russ Hunt wrote during an Inkshed Conference, "I think it important—for students and for ourselves—to

distinguish between power (that is Hitler and the cops) and authority (which is the weight experience and knowledge give). If they hear us and blindly obey, it's power and they learn nothing. If they hear and are persuaded (or not), it's authority, and maybe something can be learned. I want to help my students learn to understand authority rather than to fear power."

In a letter to me, Kenneth Bruffee raised similar issues. "Where does academic power leave off and academic authority begin?" he asks. After sharing a brief series of examples drawn from his own experiences, examples intended to represent power without authority and vice versa, Bruffee reflects on the ways in which authority and power may be distinguished by the differences in their social construction. Perhaps, Bruffee suggests, "authority is constructed by social processes of voluntary association, whereas power is constructed by social processes of involuntary association." Which is to say, I would add, that power and authority, though clearly linked historically and materially, are often *experienced* in dramatically different ways. I can only wonder at how students experience, for instance, the authority of the college president who "loves authority."

I am very grateful for Hunt's and Bruffee's thinking on these issues, and for the work of all those attempting to construct an alternative classroom ethos. But I am not particularly sanguine about being able to make the move to a classroom ethic based on responsibilities rather than traditional authority, or to disentangle authority from power, because such a move cannot occur in and of itself. We must ask, then, what context could be conducive to such a move? What institutional factors must we change to allow for such a move? I can

think of at least three: the way we use time; the way we use space; and the way we use rewards. The kinds of refiguring I have been invoking here—focusing on a community ethic that would recognize and value difference, on negotiating responsibilities, on developing inclusive understandings of authority—cannot easily occur in ten- or fourteen-week parcels of time. Nor can they easily develop in cramped and inhospitable and highly institutionalized spaces. Least of all can they develop where the system of rewards (grades) is linked to traditional models of authority and authorship. So beyond the "problem with authority," we have a set of personal and institutional problems that work to constrain us and our students and to silently support—even demand—traditional forms of what I have called an increasingly "troubled" authority. Thus to reach the goal Gesa Kirsch and Peter Mortensen describe—a notion of authority based on dialogue, connectedness, and contextual rules—seems next to impossible to me unless we can also work to uncover the silent supports of traditional authority I've tried briefly to call forth here.

And any uncovering can only take place through disrupting exclusive and exclusionary constructions of authority, in locating the ideologies of our own positions of authority, much as the graduate student/teachers I quoted at the beginning of this address. We have to question, constantly, our motives and investments. We have to be committed, as a colleague at Ohio State said to me some years ago, to giving up, to sharing privileges—even when it *doesn't work*. Especially, perhaps, when it doesn't work. Indeed, the craft of teaching demands that we do more than talk about or endlessly theorize issues of authority and power, as I have, I fear, done in these remarks.

Theorizing must, in the art and craft of teaching, share time with concrete actions taken in particular material settings, that is to say, in our classrooms. The hard work of creating a classroom community ethic worthy of a recuperated "authority"—or any one of the alternatives I've mentioned here—awaits us. And on my good days (at least), I not only welcome this work but feel cautiously optimistic about its eventual success.

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Four

THOUGHTS ON GRADUATE EDUCATION IN ENGLISH

It's no exaggeration to say that I marvel almost every day at the fact that I am a professor of English, that I have tenure, that I have enjoyed over twenty-five years of teaching and research in a field I love. It's also safe to say that no one among my teachers, or even my family, would have predicted this eventuality. After all, when I won the typing medal (!) in ninth grade, my father was certain that I had a great career as a secretary ahead of me and assumed I would take such a position after high school. Only after I won a small teaching scholarship to my state university (the University of Florida) did I secure permission to "go off to college." Once there, I learned to live down to expectations: girls shouldn't be too smart. But my intense experience with reading (I was regularly punished for reading books in elementary school when I was supposed to be doing other things) paid off. I not only did pretty well in my courses but I also came to understand that I really liked to learn and that I was besotted with reading and writing. And I was increasingly sure I wanted to teach. So one day I ventured into my advisor's office to

ask about advanced graduate study. I could remember talking with him only once before, when he had signed some forms for me. He listened to me for a few minutes and then dismissed the idea out of hand, saying that I wasn't cut out for a PhD, that I should go home and have a family. I didn't even consider objecting; I just left the office, left the university, and got a teaching job. It took seven years for me to gain the confidence to try again.

I completed my PhD in 1977, and by then some of that patronizing "it's not for you" attitude was gone from our departments. But not all. For all the change we have seen (the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that the number of women entering advanced degree programs increased almost sixty percent between 1989 and 1999), much in our departmental culture needs to change. I want to open these remarks, then, by talking briefly about access to the PhD and about entry—and persistence—in the profession and then go on to describe changes I would make—in admissions policies, in curriculum, and in the hurdles students must leap in pursuing the degree—were I actually given the mandate the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching suggested when it asked "If you could start *de novo*, what would the features of a Ph.D. program in your field be?"

To begin, I would ask that we look honestly and carefully at the culture of English studies, to determine how much of the paternalism and patronizing is still with us. For the last six or seven years, I've traveled extensively to other campuses, visiting dozens of departments each year. At every stop, I meet with graduate students and ask them about the atmosphere in their own departments. Too often, I hear stories that echo my own; often I receive e-mail or mail

after a visit, from students who didn't feel able to speak in public about harmful attitudes in their own departments.

One student wrote to send a letter she had written but never sent to its recipient. Addressed "Dear Dr. Professor," this letter described in detail how overcome with awe the new PhD students were in his class: "We hung on every word and marveled at your vast store of knowledge, your provocative interpretations, even your digressions and comical drawings." But the magic soon wears off and students realize that they are no closer to engaging the challenges of some very difficult material than they were when the course began. Still, no one objects; instead they sit and take notes and wait for an opening to speak. Sometimes, a male class member ventures something, but seldom a female. The class wears on, and this student writer leaves it thinking hard about withdrawing from graduate school: "Too bad," she says, "that I'm leaving this course feeling just as separate from, intimidated by, in awe of, and ultimately uninterested in [the great texts we were being introduced to] as I was when I entered. Sometimes I wonder if that's what you actually want—to keep us from joining some charmed inner circle of knowledge."[1]

I received the "Dear Dr. Professor" letter some years ago. More recently I got another letter from a white woman who had just managed to complete a dissertation in one of our most distinguished and elite departments. In the letter, she recounts her struggles and concludes that she would never have had the strength to continue toward the degree, given the virulent arguments among members of her committee and the opposing mandates she was being given by them—except for the support of one senior woman, not even a member of the committee, who worked extensively with her, provid-

ing encouragement and support. She concludes her letter, "What I learned in my Ph.D. is that I do not want to be part of such a profession. But I am enormously grateful to one lone woman who, at the end of my ordeal, showed me what graduate school could—and should—be like."

Over the years, I have also heard frequently from students of color who voice frustration and disenchantment with English studies in general and with their departments in particular. At best, they feel patronized; at worst, shunned. A number of students share a similar story of a faculty member saying to them outright that they were admitted only because they were Latino, African American, Chicana, and so on. One graduate student put it this way: "Early on, then, I knew that my presence was a tokenized one, unlike other grad students in the Department—though as I thought about it later, I wondered whether or not all the other graduate students were in some way tokens too."

As I write, I can almost hear the protestations: it's not like that here . . . or here . . . or here. Indeed, I think most departments now take pride in their recruitment of women and people of color. But if you look beyond the surface in almost any department, you can find stories like the ones I have told here; most of us just aren't comfortable hearing them, much less looking for them. But if these stories don't have salience, then why is our profession—especially at the top of the academic ladder—still overwhelmingly white and male?

For over thirty years, the MLA Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession has tracked answers to this question. In its most recent report, the committee reports that a larger percentage of women and students of color are entering graduate school, though the committee notes that this change is occurring at a time when

employment opportunities are drying up and when fewer white men are entering the field. "Are the employment opportunities in literary study declining (even relative to those in other disciplines) in relation to the declining presence of white men, that is, to the degree to which white women and women of color have begun to take up positions that reflect their contribution to the profession?" (192–93).

In spite of the growing numbers, white women and colleagues of color are not finding the success that the increasing numbers should indicate; white men continue to hold tenured positions and professorial rank far in excess of the percentage of the profession they represent. A 1995 NEH survey indicates that, in English, "the largest group of white men were full professors; the largest group of men of color were associate professors; the largest group of women of color were assistant professors; and the largest group of white women were instructors, adjuncts, or of similar rank" (qtd. in MLA, "Women" 201). A closer look at the survey reveals that the actual numbers of men and women of color are pitiably small.

In short, while women and people of color are coming into our graduate programs in larger numbers than ever before, they are not faring nearly as well in persevering and in moving up through the ranks of the profession. And part of this problem must surely relate to departmental culture, to the kind of patronizing attitudes that I've described, and also to our continued reliance on agonism, on competition, on individually derived and held authority, and on hierarchy as the currency with which we gain admittance to and advance in our profession. Surely it is time that we heeded Linda Hutcheon's eloquent MLA presidential address and recognized that the wolflike atmosphere she described so well is helpful, at most, to

a very small number of our students and colleagues, and that it is especially limiting to faculty members and graduate students who are women and people of color.

Members of our profession have started asking that we at least begin to name such exclusionary practices. The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Professionalization of PhDs 2002 report notes, for example:

> The committee feels strongly that equity and diversity demand that we not ignore this responsibility [to let students know what the reality is in terms of seeking jobs and advancing in the profession]. As Robert A. Gross has articulated the problem, "It was one thing for female and minority Ph.D.'s [sic] to enter an arena from which they had previously been excluded, quite another to find their way through a maze of informal practices that was often impenetrable even to white males. The absence of female and minority role models on the faculty made that progress all the more difficult." (203)

Those role models on the faculty have stories of their own about such difficulties and hierarchies. Listen to Victor Villanueva, now professor of English at Washington State University, look back on a rejection that still troubles him:

> I have . . . had a fellow worker bleed in green and red over a paper I had wished to submit for publication, have gotten the maybe-you-could-consider-submitting-this-essay-somewhere-else letter from journal editors. That's just part of the job. But I have [also] felt insulted. Some years have passed, and I have forgotten the editor who had written this rejection letter; I've even forgotten the journal, I realize as I write this. But I still bear a grudge. The essay challenged the idea of a postcolonialism, invoking Frantz Fanon. The Rejecter said

he saw no reason to resurrect Fanon. The essay also cited Aristotle and Cicero. Their resurrection went unquestioned. Rejecter also said he feared that in bringing in Fanon, I risked essentializing. . . . In the years that have followed that infuriating letter, I have seen my concerns in that essay echoed, seen a rekindled interest in Fanon grow and grow, and have heard how others of color have been insulted by a particular use of the word "essentializing." (655)

In another piece, Beverly Moss, currently associate professor of English and director of Ohio State's Center for the Study and Teaching of English and a tenured member of the English Department, says

> One of my most disturbing moments in graduate school occurred when my professor in a critical theory course wrote on my final paper that my "language was not sophisticated enough to handle the sophisticated ideas of critical theory." As a twenty-two-year-old graduate student, I understood that he was trying to tell me that I did not belong in graduate school, that people like me were not smart enough. I understood that I was the only person of color in his class (and in the entire graduate program) and that he never spoke to me the entire semester. I understood that I was not an acceptable audience in his class. And because I had imagined my audience for the paper I wrote in his class to be people like me, I was an unacceptable audience for this academic exercise. As I went further in the profession, I began to understand that this professor was appalled by my attempt to discuss Hegel and Heidegger in a language other than [the most current jargon]. And finally, I understood that in my own naïve way, I was trying to cross a line or blur a boundary; some would consider it a class line, some a color line, some even a gender line, perhaps all three. I am no longer naïve about my attempts to cross those lines. (167–68)

Beverly Moss is certainly not naïve, and she continues to be a role model and exemplary mentor. She is also—by my last count—the last person of color to be promoted up through the ranks at her university—and that tenure was granted a decade ago.

I have taken time to give voice to graduate students and colleagues because I am convinced that their stories are not anomalous. I am also convinced that their stories would be different if we would examine our admission practices and, especially, our retention practices, in graduate school and through the ranks. There may be fewer people in the profession with attitudes like the ones that kept me out of a PhD program, but these stories suggest that they have not vanished altogether. In addition, the intense culture of competition that our graduate programs foster is guaranteed to discourage those who do not prefer that mode of discursive behavior, effectively shutting them out of our PhD programs and our profession.

What would admission policies that were inclusive, that did not favor intense competition or depend on narrow and limiting criteria, look like?[2] For one thing, such policies would abjure the GRE, admitting once and for all that these scores always favor white students. In addition, admissions committees could (and I think should) look for signs of multiple intelligences by asking for more than an academic writing sample. Why not consider, for example, evidence of excellence in forms of public service or teaching, or other work-related talents? And why not recognize once and for all that an amazing student can easily emerge from a low-prestige school—and look forward to the chance to open historical, literary, and theoretical doors for that student rather than think of having to "remediate"? Finally, admissions committees could look at statements of teaching goals, giving applicants an opportunity to connect what they have

learned about literature and language with how they wish to develop as teachers who are serious about "professing." Taking teaching into consideration in our admissions deliberations would be one way of strengthening that challenge and changing the mixed messages we have been giving graduate students for a long time about the relationship between scholarship and teaching.

In a 2002 issue of *Profession*, John Guillory comments on our profession's longtime antipathy to "the very idea of pedagogy," an antipathy he interrogates and begins to challenge (169). Elaine Showalter also takes up the question of teaching in a 2003 *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece, saying that the new conversations on teaching "are both welcome and long overdue" (par. 4). Showalter turns to the example of drama, where a focus on teaching as performance offers a possible disciplinary model, and she reports on the approach taken in the UK, where pedagogy has been more seriously engaged than it has been here. Showalter might also have pointed to the extensive research on teaching carried out by scholars of rhetoric and writing studies; indeed, the literature in that field about teaching both reading and writing is extensive, and *College English*, an old and distinguished journal with a very wide circulation, regularly publishes articles on the teaching of literature, language, and writing. We thus have no shortage of models for rethinking our relationship to pedagogy, and a natural place to begin this rethinking is in our graduate programs, by bringing our student colleagues into serious engagement with the issues of how best to teach (and to learn) language, literature, and writing.

Changing the exclusionary culture of our departments through such things as admissions policies or more rigorous attention to teaching is one way to rethink the PhD. Another is to consider

carefully what students actually do during their years of graduate study, in terms of courses they take, the classes they TA for and teach, and the series of hoops all students must pass through in securing the degree.[3] In "The Ph.D. in English: Towards a New Consensus," Gerald Graff notes that the English doctoral program has moved from "a relatively stable institution with pre-established rules and conventions to which students conformed to a do-it-yourself kit that depends for its shape on each student's particular interests and creative initiative" (2). Graff argues that these changes have, taken as a whole, been beneficial, and I agree, since they can admit of a very wide interpretation of English studies and make room for new and often breathtakingly imaginative projects. These de facto changes, however, carry with them an implicit and important redefinition of the subjects or Bakhtinian heroes of the field—reading and writing. In other words, such changes reflect changes in what our students are doing as well as the ways in which they are defining our subjects of study. Look around at the projects graduate students are working on now and you will find a very broad definition of "literature" and reading, a definition that clearly includes film, video, multimedia and hypertext, and discourses not traditionally thought of as "literature" (such as Deaf and Spoken Word poetry, cookbooks, tombstone inscriptions) right alongside studies of canonical writers and their print texts. In terms of "writing," an expanded definition is also clearly emerging, as what counts as writing now often includes sound, video, and images of all kinds as well as a wide and growing range of genres and discourses, from African American Vernacular English to Spanglish to American Sign Language. Rather than seeing such discourses and forms as marginal or as something "extra" added to the curriculum, I favor curricula that embrace these forms as their

purview. Of course learning to teach new forms, new discourses, new genres, even new formats presents a challenge, but many in English studies have already gained such expertise and stand ready to teach others.

What I have said thus far argues implicitly for thinking of English studies—of what we and our students do—as encompassing literature, language, and writing. I am well aware that many departments do not now define themselves in this way; indeed, the last dozen years have seen the rise of new departments (or sometimes programs) of writing and/or rhetoric and of creative writing that stand distinct from departments that focus narrowly on the reading of American and British literature. And many departments have reduced the number of language courses they offer, cutting out, for example, Old and Middle English, applied linguistics, and discourse analysis. Some would argue that this trend toward division and separation is of long standing: some thirty-five years ago, William Riley Parker tracked the breakup of English studies through the withdrawal from the Modern Language Association of several groups, including those that founded the National Council of Teachers of English (1911), the Speech Communication Association (1914), and the Linguistics Society of America (1924).

In spite of such breakups, as Graff and others have demonstrated, a rough consensus has held in English studies that has often allowed for the study of literature, writing, and language to coexist and even—sometimes—profit mutually. The trend toward separating literature, writing and rhetoric, and creative writing into narrowly defined departments may continue, but if it does, it will be in stark contradiction to the new and expansive definitions of reading and writing described above. Separating reading and writing (and, in

fact, subdividing writing) seems especially counterproductive, given the ways in which these communicative acts are merging in electronic communication and in the media and the ways in which new and developing genres make it increasingly difficult to categorize writing in terms of the old, familiar modes.

If graduate study in English can be described as a more open-ended and wide-ranging "do-it-yourself kit," and if it can encompass the broad (re)definitions of reading and writing I have offered, what will hold English together? What will serve as the glue that the old standard curriculum and rules used to provide? First, a clear and detailed articulation of what constitutes the purview of English studies—no matter how far ranging—would help to accomplish this goal. More important, however, would be rethinking the work students do in our graduate programs.[4]

In regard to introductory course work for the PhD, I am in partial agreement with Graff, who has been admonishing us for many years to "teach the conflicts" and who in his 2003 contribution to the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate proposes that we "organize introductory [graduate] courses around contested issues" (38). I would, however, modify Graff's suggestion in at least two ways. First, I would think of the introductory work of the PhD not primarily in terms of individual courses; rather, students entering the PhD should grapple with large questions and projects, which they would undertake with at least several other students. These projects should in my view focus on major issues in much the way Graff describes: what *is* American Literature? What counts as "the best" writing? Are there better, and worse, ways of reading texts? What is the relationship between literature, broadly conceived, and its media? Taking on a major issue and working with others to explore its many nuances

would introduce students not only to important ideas and information in our field but also, importantly, to the powerful effects of collaboration. I have written at length (some would say ad nauseam) on the benefits of collaboration for the humanities ("Collaboration"). Here I will just say that a growing body of evidence suggests that advanced work in the humanities increasingly calls for the kind of research that one solitary scholar is unlikely to be able to do. Jay Winter, who collaborated with other historians, editors, directors, and artists to produce *The Great War* argues that this project—which has the potential to shape a generation's understanding—would have been utterly impossible to do alone. By introducing our graduate students to the possibilities and potential of collaborative research and offering them a means of engaging in it productively, we can begin training a generation of students who can take up Winters's challenge.

Making such a change to the introductory year (or first two years) of PhD work would bring it with other changes as well. It would almost certainly militate against any kind of general coverage exam of the kind I took at the end of my MA degree (a two-hour ordeal, as I recall, during which I was to answer questions on a list of texts, from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf), and that still caps the first year or so of PhD work in some programs. Rather the kind of collaborative research projects I have been describing would call for performative exams, with students preparing written documents, both individually and collaboratively written, and presenting the results of their research to the larger departmental and university community. In some ways, such a system would echo the qualifying papers some departments now call for, though broadening them to include collaboratively written work. In other ways, it would echo the system

used in many Canadian and some European universities, where PhD candidates make formal presentations of their doctoral research to "all comers." In any event, such a change in the examination or qualifying framework would be commensurate with the new definitions of reading and writing I have offered here; it would connect the student candidate's research and teaching; and it would focus in beneficial ways on the growing prominence of what Walter Ong calls "secondary orality"—that is, spoken presentation that is already very much inflected by writing.

Readers still with me have no doubt guessed where I'm going, and that is squarely toward the notion of PhD students engaging in large-scale research projects, including dissertations, during their tenure. While students should always have the choice of taking a narrow and highly defined topic (gambling in eighteenth-century writing; early modern women's prefaces to translations; a reading of two 1930s women poets), they should also have an opportunity to engage the kind of project that calls for more than one researcher (one that, for example, required complete fluency in several languages; one that required expertise in digital media; one that combined two or more disciplines). Allowing for collaborative dissertations will present a great challenge to our imaginations and our organizational abilities: such projects will have to be carefully delimited and described; they will need to require the work of more than one person; and they will have to demonstrate equal contributions on the part of all parties. But they are not impossible to conceive. Indeed, I am aware of two collaboratively written dissertations that have been accepted by their departments, and at the 2002 MLA Conference on the Future of Doctoral Education, an entire working group entertained this issue, with at least some members arguing forcefully for such opportunities

for our students. Here we might be wisest to let our students lead us: they are the ones who are conceiving such projects, and they have solid and imaginative ways of going about this work. We have much to learn from listening to them.

A PhD program with any of the features I have described would necessarily be one in which graduate students were colleagues rather than acolytes, our partners in exploring major issues, in constructing new knowledge, and in sharing the wealth of our experiences, our learning, and our teaching. In such an atmosphere, a focus on pedagogy would be right and necessary, though rather than students taking pedagogy seminars or "training workshops" aimed at instructing them in how to be good TAs for large classes or how to conduct first-year writing classes, they would become members of ongoing teaching/pedagogy circles that would include faculty, staff, and graduate students, again working collaboratively on major questions facing all teachers of English: what do our pedagogical practices suggest about the theories we hold? How do we best engage all students in productive and cooperative intellectual debate? How can we create assignments that call forth the best and most diverse thinking, writing, and speaking of which our students are capable? How can we create an effective classroom ethos? How do we respond to and evaluate student work in ways that are rigorous and honest but not appropriative? How can we establish and share authority among participants? How do we develop and share knowledge both in and out of the classroom?

Ideally, these teaching or pedagogy circles would be small and would be cocoordinated by faculty and students who would work together to present an agenda to be considered by all. In addition, these groups would offer multiple opportunities for teaching and

team teaching, opportunities that would afford time for careful response and follow-up and time for students to make explicit and lasting connections between their research and their teaching. Team teaching could serve as a compelling replacement for the system of using graduate students as teaching assistants who lead discussion sections, meet with the students, and grade written work while the faculty member is engaged primarily with lecturing. Working with a graduate student or students to plan and develop materials for a course, prepare and deliver the lectures, meet with and counsel the students, and respond to class assignments would do much more to prepare graduate students for taking on courses of their own than the present TA system, which all too often assigns sole responsibility for writing classes to graduate students from the moment they enter the program; indeed, some programs rely on beginning graduate students to teach two, and sometimes even three, such courses. Some universities already have such a team teaching plan in place, though all too often it has been instituted as a way to teach more students at lower costs (a faculty lecturer and three teaching assistants, for example, "teaching" one hundred or more students) than as a way to focus the department's attention on pedagogy and to mentor and prepare new members of our profession. In my view, graduate students should have an opportunity to design and teach (or team teach) several courses during their PhD programs, including introductory courses in writing, in language, and in at least one field of literature.

Rethinking the PhD along the rough lines I have presented here would go a long way toward opening up our discipline to new and exciting voices and toward resisting the hierarchy that still informs most of our departmental structures and practices. Such a rethink-

ing also has the potential to bring the work we do more directly into the public eye, offering us an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of our work to the public good. Toward that end, PhD programs might well follow the example of several departments in engaging faculty and students in community outreach projects. One well-developed and very effective program is in place at Carnegie Mellon, where members of the department have worked for years to establish and maintain a vibrant community literacy center and where graduate students work with members of the center to bring about change and achieve social justice in their community. Moving in such a direction would offer opportunities for engaging literacy—reading, writing, speaking—in a variety of settings; such contact would almost certainly double back around to inform the research graduate students undertake during the PhD. It would also bring faculty and students more directly in contact with the work of the public schools. And that contact in turn could lead the way toward focusing more directly on the job of preparing teachers for our nation's schools. Finally, working within the community reinforces the practice of collaboration, of shared knowledge production, of responsibility (and what Bakhtin calls response-ability), and of merging literacy practices advocated in earlier parts of this talk.

Can we rethink the PhD in ways that will make our programs more open and inclusive, more truly diverse, more responsive to the dreams and desires of our students, more connected to emerging definitions of reading and writing, more collaborative, more engaged with issues close to the hearts of our communities? *Of course we can*.

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NOTES

Chapter 1. Key Questions for a New Rhetoric

1. In making this claim about the linking of rhetoric to composition as a feature of a "new" rhetoric, I could go on to trace the progression from a focus on student writing (the process movement in composition and rhetoric) to a growing realization of how vastly writers differ (the late social constructionist and postprocess movements) and inevitably to the realization of the importance of difference of all kinds to writing and the teaching of writing. That trajectory leads to another radical revisioning of rhetoric—as potentially inclusive and nonhierarchical, for example—and has been the subject of a number of efforts by feminist and postcolonial scholars.

Chapter 3. "Authority" in the Writing Classroom

1. In a series of freewritings (or Inksheddings, as some of us have learned to call them) held during the May 1995 Inkshed Conference, an anonymous contributor wrote provocatively of the links between authority and Western individualism. "It's another kind of deep-seated individualism," this writer remarked, "to believe that we, as teachers, 'own' authority in such a form that allows us to give it away. Authority resides nowhere in us as individuals. . . . Authority is a constructed dynamic that shapes activity and language and, reciprocally, is shaped by activity and

language. We need to help our students see sources of authority in situations not necessarily embodied in people but in activities."

2. Particularly helpful in regard to our field's near obsession with plagiarism, and a concomitant tendency to label as plagiarism discursive acts that, in areas other than student writing, we would not find suspect at all, is Rebecca Howard's essay "Plagiarism, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty." See also her book, *Standing in the Shadow of Giants*, where she explores the ways in which the "author construct" has affected composition theory and pedagogy.

3. Given this analysis, is it any wonder that composition teachers (most often female), and composition studies (a feminized field), have had such great difficulty establishing authority?

Chapter 4. Thoughts on Graduate Education in English

1. The students I quote have given me permission to report their words but not their names.

2. As it stands now, most admissions committees typically consider the stature of the program from which an applicant comes, along with that person's GRE scores (some departments set a minimum that must be met for consideration), statement of purpose, letters of reference, and a writing sample. As a whole, this set of requirements invites and indeed demands high competition, and it privileges those who have been able to attend the most prestigious schools as well as those who have begun to "talk the talk" of the profession.

3. In most English PhD programs, students take a specified number of courses, after which an examination of some sort qualifies them for candidacy to the PhD. Such exams may include everything from an oral exam aimed at establishing "coverage" to written exams on a student's major and minor fields of study and/or dissertation project. Thereafter,

students present dissertation prospectuses (which may or may not be accompanied by another exam), write a dissertation under the supervision of a faculty director and several committee members, and then participate in a dissertation defense before graduating.

4. While it is quite difficult to generalize, I think it safe to say that most PhD programs require some form of introduction to theories and methods in the field as well as demonstrated reading mastery of one or more languages and a minimum number of individual courses in English and American literature.

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